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AUTHOR	Hawley, Willis D.; Valli, Linda
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ABSTRACT

The National Partnership for Excellence in Education and Accountability in Teaching (NPEAT) helps place improvement of teaching at the center of reform efforts, addressing two problems that impede the development of systemic reforms to improve teaching quality: (1) absence of agreement about effective strategies for improving teaching among those who significantly influence teacher capabilities and motivation and teaching conditions; and (2) discontinuity, inconsistency, and misalignment of policies and practices that influence teaching quality across the teaching career continuum. This Digest describes how NPEAT emphasizes best strategies to attract, prepare, retain, and support teachers who serve needy students in urban schools. Policies that help direct NPEAT are set by a Policy Board composed of representatives from 30 organizations. NPEAT's work is organized into Policy and Practice Strands encompassing high-promise strategies for improving teaching: recruitment and retention, teacher preparation, induction, continuing professional development, and standards and assessment. The strands include interrelated activities: developing research-based consensus around ideas, principles, and promising policies and practices; disseminating knowledge and support of related action by partners and others; identifying what we need to know more about; and conducting relevant research and development that leads to usable knowledge. NPEAT focuses on understanding and facilitating effective partnerships to enhance teaching quality. It engages in activities that encourage and support implementation of effective policies and practices. Its goal is to ensure that America provides all students with access to competent, caring teachers. (Contains 16 references.) (SM)

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Willis D. Hawley and Linda Valli

All children need excellent teachers. But those who need outstanding teachers most are children placed at risk because of the economic conditions of their families and communities; racial and ethnic discrimination; limited command of English; and physical, emotional, or mental disabilities (National Commission, 1996).

The National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching (NPEAT), which is primarily funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement, seeks to place the improvement of teaching at the center of efforts to improve schools (National Commission, 1996). To this end, NPEAT addresses two central problems that impede the development of systemic reforms to improve the quality of teaching: (1) the absence of agreement about effective strategies for improving teaching among those who significantly influence the capabilities and motivation of teachers and the conditions of teaching, and (2) the discontinuity, inconsistency, and misalignment of policies and practices that influence the quality of teaching across the career continuum of teachers. This Digest describes how NPEAT focuses its attention on the best strategies to attract, prepare, retain, and support teachers who serve the nation's neediest students in urban schools.

The Partnership

Many organizations hold membership in NPEAT, but the policies that give direction to the partnership are set by a Policy Board composed of representatives from:

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
American Association of School Administrators
American Council on Education
American Federation of Teachers
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Council for Basic Education
Council for Exceptional Children
Council of Chief State School Officers
Council of the Great City Schools
Education Commission of the States
Education Week
The Holmes Partnership
International Reading Association
National Alliance of Business
National Association for the Education of Young Children
National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of State Boards of Education
National Board for Professional Teaching Standards
National Commission on Teaching & America's Future
National Conference of State Legislatures
National Council for Teachers of Mathematics
National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education
National Education Association
National School Boards Association
National Staff Development Council
New American Schools
Recruiting New Teachers, Inc.
Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

NPEAT Projects and Activities

The work of NPEAT is organized into Policy & Practice Strands that encompass high-promise strategies for improving teaching: Recruitment and Retention, Teacher Preparation, Induction, Continuing Professional Development, and Standards and Assessments. These strands include an interrelated set of activities: the development of research-based consensus around ideas, principles, and promising policies and practices; the dissemination of knowledge and the support of related action by partners and others; the identification of what we need to know more about; and the conduct of relevant research and development that leads, in turn, to usable knowledge.

Recruitment and Retention

NPEAT activities related to recruitment and retention address the following issues: What are the most effective strategies to recruit, admit, and retain students from underrepresented groups and for areas in which there are teacher shortages? What institutional, state, and national policies would change the characteristics of the teaching force? What roles do public schools, community groups, institutions of higher learning, and state policymakers play in obtaining a more talented and diverse population in teaching? What models of recruitment exist in local partnerships and in states that could serve as exemplars for schools and school systems throughout the nation? How can we eliminate the need for emergency certification of unqualified teachers? (Boyer & Baptiste, 1996; Murnane, Singer, Willett, Kemple, & Olsen, 1991; Darling-Hammond & Sclan, 1996; NASBE, 1998)

Teacher Preparation

A second area of work is the development and study of initial teacher preparation programs that ensure that new teachers have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to effectively teach diverse students. These programs are seen as the mutual responsibility of university liberal arts and education school faculties, and K-12 school faculties where field experiences are undertaken.

Some of the essential questions to which NPEAT is seeking answers are: How can the commitment of colleges and universities to the preparation of teachers be strengthened? Does designing teacher education programs around national standards improve teachers' effectiveness—especially those who work in high-risk schools? How can teacher education candidates be taught to use technology to facilitate student learning? How can colleges and universities be held accountable for the quality of the teachers they prepare? How do the processes and cultures of professional development schools influence teacher and student learning? (Holmes Group, 1990; Roth, 1999)

Induction

Arguably, improving the successful induction of new teachers into the profession would be the single most cost-effective strategy for improving teaching. Investment in sound recruitment strategies and initial preparation programs that draw capable individuals into teaching will be wasted unless schools are structured to make use of new teachers' talents and sustain their commitment. Thus, NPEAT is investigating induction programs for novice teachers that enhance their capabilities and commitments

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to teaching. These include year-long intern or residency programs and various types of mentored learning experiences (Huling-Austin, 1990; Feiman-Nemser & Parker, 1992).

Continuing Professional Development

Professional development may enhance teacher knowledge and motivation. But unless the conditions of work make possible new approaches to teaching, teachers are unlikely to change their classroom practice (Hawley & Rosenholtz, 1985; Little, 1993; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Fullan, 1994; Sykes & Darling-Hammond, 1999). Therefore, NPEAT focuses attention on how schools can be restructured to simultaneously foster teacher learning and student learning. The fundamental questions asked in this set of activities are: What is the relationship between teacher and student learning? What and how do teachers learn throughout their careers? How can schools be restructured to improve teaching and learning?

Standards and Assessments

New standards for teaching are a promising lever for transforming teacher education and professional development, and ultimately teaching and learning. Standards have the potential to clearly link teacher learning opportunities from teacher preparation programs through career-long education and to ensure that students are taught by teachers who are knowledgeable and competent (Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Klein, 1995; Wilson & Ball, 1996).

NPEAT research and development seeks to guarantee that standards and assessments really measure teachers' effectiveness with students and that new assessments are fair and appropriate. Equally important are NPEAT studies that seek to understand what kinds of learning opportunities teachers need in order to meet these demanding new standards and what kinds of teaching contexts support competent and accomplished teaching.

Facilitating Knowledge-based Action to Improve Teaching

A large part of the reason the nation fails to provide highly qualified teachers for all its children is the misalignment of the principal influences on the teaching profession—including university degree requirements, union contracts, license requirements, certification standards, tenure requirements, public perception of the teacher's work, in-service requirements, salary and reward structures, and leadership practices. Therefore, in all its work, NPEAT focuses on understanding and facilitating effective partnerships that seek to enhance the quality of teaching.

NPEAT engages in several types of activities that encourage and support the implementation of effective policies and practices. The various strategies to foster the use of knowledge to achieve systemic reforms that NPEAT employs include the collaborative ways it designs and conducts research; publications by NPEAT and its partners; workshops, conferences and teleconferences; the development of models of effective practice and learning materials for use in professional development; technical assistance; and the support of knowledge-based collaborative action.

While pursuing these strategies, NPEAT will make extensive use of telecommunications. Persons and organizations interested in the improvement of teaching can participate in a National Dialogue on the Improvement of Teaching through NPEAT's web site (www.npeat.org). The dialogue identifies the characteristics of effective policies and practices, summarizes the relevant research, and provides examples of programs that work and references to sources of support. The National Dialogue and information about all of NPEAT's activities and findings from its research are available on the web site.

Conclusion

NPEAT's goal is to ensure that America will provide all students with their educational birthright: access to competent, caring teachers. NPEAT's work is focused on a set of strategies that hold promise for continuously improving the quality of teaching. Knowledge from research and the wisdom of practice is used to develop consensus about principles and guidelines for the design of improved policy and practices. As NPEAT supports the implementation of effective strategies it also studies variations in their impact. This, in turn, yields new topics for research and strengthens the foundation for the continuous improvement of teaching.

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ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education
1-800-822-9229 http://www.ericsp.org query@aacte.org

Mary E. Dilworth, Director
Judy A. Beck, Associate Director
Willis D. Hawley, NPEAT and Linda Valli, University of Maryland (Authors)

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